

Tribal Council Travel Report:

Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan (ITC) Meeting/"Honoring Our Children Initiative"

November 9, 2012

Kewadin Casino Hotel, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

This initiative is part of a grant project funded by the Kellogg Foundation. Its overall goal is to plan, organize and create a strategy to focus the Tribes' attention on early childhood needs in our communities. In a nutshell, it was stated that our purpose during the one-day meeting was to gather to begin to build a collective blueprint for advocacy for our youngest citizens.

The first speaker was Amy Zaagman from the Michigan Council for Maternal Child Health. She spoke about the general concept of advocacy and then presented information on a successful recipe for advocacy on children's issues: 1) combine relevant data expressed in a clear and concise way; 2) identify desired outcomes for children and families and possible obstacles; 3) capitalize on trends, initiatives and relationships; 4) add specific experience and passion to make a difference; and, 5) craft meaningful policy solutions together.

She also reminded us that, as citizens of the State of Michigan and federally-recognized tribes, that we have a lot to offer the process of advocacy. Ms. Zaagman said that advocacy does make a difference; that we all have knowledge, experience and expertise that positions us to be good advocates by using our personal experience. It is that personal experience that is needed by policy makers who make the decisions that affect us and others. On top of that, we are able to add passion to what may otherwise just be policy decisions.

Furthermore, in doing advocacy, you need to start with simply speaking up; and support solutions that have already been proposed; seek changes to solutions already proposed, including current budget items; work with a legislator to craft a singular solution; and, try to work with other advocates who share your desired solutions.

She also briefed us on the “hot” issues in Lansing right now: Infant Mortality – Safe Sleep, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is putting together information that would be used across state government reinforcing safe sleep messages; Obesity, the governor has the Four-by-Four Initiative, but it is based on personal responsibility which is a “slight” disconnect because most kids are not the ones who control what food choices are available to them and, for the most part, do not control what goes into their mouths; In-Home Health Care, coordinating care for families that need health care in the home for small children; Preschool , there is a \$140 million proposed investment into early childhood projects, with a big push for “set-aside” funds for 0-3; Home Visits, for families that have children up to age five (including prenatal care); and, lastly, a general discussion on the current early childhood educational system.

The second speaker was Derek Bailey, MSW, Principal of 7th Legacy Consulting LLC. His presentation was titled, “Engaging Tribal Leadership.” He is a former Chairman of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and a consultant on government relations for the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan.

He began by mentioning that he had attended a world conference on early childhood development where he was struck by the information on the importance of brain development during early childhood, and more specifically, between the ages of zero to five. Further, there was research that spoke to the relationship between the quality of brain development and family income levels, that there is a huge disparity there.

Some of the points that he made were mostly pointers on working/approaching tribal leadership and, utilizing his own previous experience, spoke to the policy making and advocacy topics from the tribal leadership point-of-view. He made the point that each tribal leader has a personal and professional background that is unique, and when YOU are elected to tribal leadership, its very

interesting to realize how your “macro” decisions impact in “micro-”types of ways. Today’s tribal leaders are more open to negotiate, but we need to be careful because in negotiations you give away a little bit, and in essence, this can erode sovereignty.

He continued with stating that there is, first, a need to develop an understanding of history and historical trauma. This includes things like tribal customs, lifestyles, traditions, and changes that occurred upon European contact. For example, the roles of men and women were changed; our clan system was changed; the introduction of alcohol as part of the treaty negotiation process. He added that post-contact change also includes a lot of residual effects from European contact. He added that it’s important to always remember that there is no right or wrong in tribal leadership. For example, he said that he is more of a “suit and tie” person while some people dress in traditional clothing/items for tribal council meetings, events, governmental activities, etc. Important to remember the “life walk” that each tribal leader has taken, what they may be a product of and what those experiences are, e.g. family upbringing/dynamics, cultural influences, education, religion/spirituality, etc. As a final note, he said that, as advocates approaching the leadership, that we cannot take the non-passage of our work products or requests, personally. He said that it only means that our messaging was not right or that the timing of our *successful* passage was not right...It’s all about timing!

Following lunch, there were focus group/talking circle discussions that were organized by tribal community. We were directed to discuss the current disparities in our communities that affect our young children. The discussion was then steered toward visioning healthy Anishinaabe children. In our group, we had a wide-array of community members in attendance. I thought it was wonderful that we had the LTBB community so well-represented and that we had people who were able to assist with the visioning exercise from many different directions; some of the folks in attendance: Tony Davis, Councilor Bentley, Rochelle Ettawageshik, Andrea Otto, Tammy Okuly, Mike Smith, Julie Kappulia,

Theresa Chingwa, Dawn Assinaway, Matthew Davis, Heidi Bosma, Debbie DeLeon and Mickey from the LTBB Head Start Program. I believe I have listed everyone from our community, but I apologize for not having a definite list of attendees. I will be requesting a copy of the comments that were generated in our group because it was an excellent arena for insight into some of the thoughts, feelings and concerns from our own people in regards to our youngest citizens. This was my favorite part of the summit.

A couple of other notable comments that were made once the small groups returned to our larger group discussions were made by Michael Smith, from LTBB, and Hunter Genia, who was there representing the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. Michael Smith spoke about the LTBB Constitution and how our governing powers are reserved by the tribal citizens, and that our people are the ones that direct the three branches of government to enact the different principles that are listed for each branch. One directive principle in the Constitution that Mike quoted was to “promote with special care the health, educational and economic interests of all the people, especially our children and elders, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.” He said that, for him, he uses that section of the Constitution to describe what a healthy and well-balanced child looks like. Hunter Genia spoke about the fact that studies show that if our children have at least one caring adult in their lives, they will be more successful. He asked, “What would it be like if they had even one more caring adult, let alone a community of adults that care about them?” He also urged the men who were at the meeting to go back to their communities and begin to enlist other men to get more involved and active in supporting our youth.

During the last part of the day, I sat in on the presentation by Inter-Tribal Council staff regarding specific budgeting and administration details. It was stated that each Michigan tribe is receiving approximately \$5100.00 to help the “Honoring our Children Initiative” reach their objectives. The step we were completing by having the summit was the beginning of the data collection requirement on

needs and priorities for each of our tribes with special attention to identifying the disparities. The ITC staff also asked what each tribe has for established resources and infrastructure to continue to collect data, what are possible needs that tribes may have and what does ITC need to do to assist each tribe with reaching their goals for their children. They are also putting together a steering committee that will communicate, on a monthly basis with tribes, to help guide and keep track of where tribes are in the process and if there is anything else ITC needs to do to assist us.

I was glad that I was able to attend this meeting. I was even more impressed that LTBB had such a large group represent our Tribe, especially in terms of Executive departments' staff that will be helping administer the funds that we receive in combination with the community members' enthusiastic participation. I look forward to the progress that we can make to give our children an even brighter future. I want to thank the community for allowing me to attend this meeting.

Respectfully submitted by,

Councilor Winnay Wemigwase